Homelessness

Does the Census measure homelessness?

‘Homelessness' is not a characteristic that is directly measured in the Census through questions on the Census form.

Estimates of the homeless population may be derived from the Census using analytical techniques, based on both the characteristics observed in the Census and assumptions about the way people may respond to Census questions. For significant components of the homeless population, Census variables cannot inform on the homeless state of the people whom it enumerates.

Enumeration procedures

The enumeration procedures that were used in the 2011 Census are described in the fact sheet Enumeration procedures for the homeless.

Can I use any Census variables to estimate homelessness?

There is no single variable in the Census which can accurately inform on homelessness. Data item categories such as 'improvised home, tents, sleepers out' and 'no usual address' will include both people who were homeless on Census Night and people who were unlikely to be homeless. Such variables need to be considered along with other data collected in the Census to assist in determining whether or not a person was likely to have been homeless on Census Night.

Are there any other ABS data which inform on homelessness?

The Census is not the only source of data from which the ABS publishes estimates of homelessness. The 2010 General Social Survey (GSS) results, published in September 2011, included a module on previous experiences of homelessness. *See* Housing and homelessness in *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia*, 2010 (cat. no. 4159.0).

In March 2012, the ABS released an article entitled Life after homelessness in the publication *Australian Social Trends* (cat. no. 4102.0) drawing on those GSS results. The article examines a range of socio-economic indicators of those who had experienced at least one episode of homelessness in the 10 years prior to the survey, but were no longer homeless.

ABS definitions and estimates of homelessness

The ABS statistical definition of homelessness is outlined in the ABS publication Information Paper – A Statistical Definition of Homelessness, 2012 (cat. no. 4922.0). The definition was developed in consultation with the ABS Homelessness Statistics Reference Group. Future ABS surveys and the Census will adopt this definition in its collection and output of current and past experiences of homelessness.

Official estimates of the prevalence of homelessness from the 2011 Censuses are presented in the publication Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, 2011 (cat. no. 2049.0). The estimates have been produced using the ABS' methodology for estimating homelessness from the Census.

More information on the methodology can be found in the Information Paper – Methodology for Estimating Homelessness from the Census of Population and Housing, 2012 (cat. no. 2049.0.55.001).

Earlier published information on the work the ABS has undertaken can be found in Discussion Paper – Methodological Review of Counting the Homeless, 2006 (cat. no. 2050.0.55.001), released in March 2011 and Position Paper – ABS Review of Counting Homeless Methodology (cat. no. 2050.0.55.002), released in August 2011.